



# Sequoia Review

spring 1989



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**Prize Winner**  
**Katy Berotti**

**Caroling**

Mother stripped the dolls naked  
and lined them up under the window,

Their stiff pink arms reached out  
for warmth. Father gave donkey rides;

he'd bray until dropping in the hall.  
If he snored we left him there.

I can still hear Mother yanking  
a comb through plastic hair.

It still hurts. One year Mother  
wouldn't open her gifts. One year

Father started the season early.  
In his car, I found the bottle,

I wrote him in a letter  
*Stop now, before you kill me*

Then I drank the sonuvabitch.  
We broke bottles on street signs.

Timmy was little, but he wasn't fat  
like Ben, who drove us in his truck.

I hadn't eaten so we bought sausages  
and ate them sitting on the tailgate.

It was December and I was hungry,  
Timmy smelled like gin so I ate them all.

Father was asleep over the wheel,  
*Come in, Daddy, you'll be sick*

he moved so I went in but came out,  
*Come in;* he said to leave him alone

so I slammed the car door, I slammed  
the back door, hell, I left the bastard.



### Little Girl Blue

At four or five I crawl  
under bushes and listen  
to my dog. She's dug  
us each a hole for wallowing;  
she likes to lick my face.  
A TV channel shows  
my entire life 24 hours  
a day so I always hurry  
in the bathroom. I count  
on my fingers, sing  
my ABC's. I smile bravely  
for the camera, I am  
the forgotten Rapunzel,  
the baby wolf licking  
her wounds, the child martyr.  
Later I write under posters  
notes to my future  
biographers. These are  
my first poems, full  
of insufferable pity.  
In adolescence I get  
a record player, learn  
the words to *At Seventeen*  
because I have brown eyes.  
I imagine myself dying  
of natural causes while I sleep,  
imagine my father trying  
to wake me, at the funeral  
I hear *Sweet Baby James*.  
When I can, I take the car.  
Windows down, Janis Joplin  
wailing, I'm glad it rains,  
I'm glad I can't see.  
What I want is a dramatic  
ending, the car skidding  
or me alone on the cold tile  
of my bathroom. I want  
someone besides me to feel  
sorry; I want to make noise.  
I sit with my back pressed  
to the wall, pull my arms  
to my chest and soundlessly  
soak my sheets.



## Open

The Hudson River washing over  
my feet makes me believe I'm  
moving. Everything goes by

quickly, and I imagine  
you must be living near  
water. From their sandy beds

I snatch the roundest pebbles  
made smooth by travel and roll  
them roughly between my palms.

Grudge-fucking, you called it,  
but I opened to you like a wound.  
Moving out of anger, we beat

our bodies together, exchanging  
one hurt for another. I wanted  
to pass right through you, leave

you before you left me. But you  
held my wrists and pushed me  
to the wall, I held on

hoping, like water, it would  
lift us both. Beaten, I climbed  
on your chest and slept

the way a half-drowned man  
sleeps on a beach. Now,  
I'm waist high in water,

my ankles sinking under  
the sand. I drop the pebbles,  
believing I feel your fingers.

When I want you too badly,  
I dive into water.  
When you want me, stand

in the rain, hold in your hand  
a ripe tomato, bite it  
like a plum, let the juice

run down your chin, swallow  
the sweet pulp with rain;  
these are my darkest kisses.



*Jenn Brown***24 Delaware Drive**

I used to walk with an old Italian woman  
around her neighborhood in South Jersey.  
A man twice her age married her  
when she was only thirteen,  
she told me; he brought her here,  
without her family, without anything,  
even sold her crucifix and locket  
to pay passage from Sicily.

Pulling up her skirt, she showed  
the scars that dented her thigh  
where she woke one night  
to a rat— big as a small dog,  
she claimed, and it clung jealously.  
she didn't sleep well after that,  
waking up with that same breathless  
groping for a shoe or a stick.

After that, she kept a sturdy stick  
by her bed, now a walking stick,  
worn to the shape of her hand.  
Just right for pointing out to me  
her favorite place by the gardenias,  
or showing me where to look for the best  
tomatoes and peppers for dinner.

After we'd cut the pasta and hung it  
to dry; she showed me her pictures;  
only a few, faded and wrinkled like the skin  
on her hands, and as fragile.  
In my favorite, her face looked out at me  
almost fiercely, without a smile  
for the camera or the child tugging  
her hand.



### One Love Up My Alley

By the time I offered him a pretzel  
there was no stopping.  
He was cooler than a slow blade,  
his wink said it: *'If my aim's as good  
as you look, babe, we've got this one  
in the bag.'* When he let that ball go,  
I could tell: there was no Thursday-night  
bowling league in his future.  
He was a man, he liked his women  
tough as lean meat and twice as saucy.  
As for me, one bed's as good as the next,  
and with a man like that  
who cares if the sheets don't match:  
when he drives me down I-85  
on a hot day, I'll be counting the strikes.

### Ruzha Cleaveland

#### My Mouth

Mouths should be disposable.  
Wear a Garbo slit and  
want to be alone. Try the Sandra  
Dee rosebud model with a  
  
new bikini or let your  
hair grow then get a  
voluptuous Jacklyn Smith pucker.  
My mouth, sad to say, is permanent,  
  
a food grabber surrounded by  
day-old lipstick, creases  
escaping sideways in a grin, returning  
then to prim austerity. Only  
  
a teeth framer, prelude to my  
chin, postlude to my nose, pushed out  
to kiss, an intersection  
from cheek to cheek.



### Combining Wheat on the Fourth of July

Our field ends at scrubby trees  
where flour mill silos mark  
the edge of town. Up the hill,  
along cobblestoned streets, everyone  
picnics under lacings of oak trees. But I combine wheat,  
work as the white sky surrounds me  
glare growing in the sun's rise,  
heat shimmers making me squint,  
feel smaller, race against  
predicted rain to separate forty acres  
of heavy brown grain from straw,  
broken and gold.

I wish off gathering clouds, know  
friends buy Mrs. Kamm's pound cake,  
taste apple butter on the Methodists'  
homemade bread, long to dump my math teacher  
from the dunking machine. Still this machine  
drones up and down cutting swaths  
of heavy sheaves, disgorging grain  
into its hopper and my whining tractor stops,  
only to empty the hopper fill a wagon.

Brown shrinks, gold grows, and the heat  
assails me, sops my shirt, reddens  
neck and forearms already lined  
by wheat chaff, dust from wheel ruts  
stirred into my face, irritant  
keeping me awake, while the last hopper

empties. I am bleached and flattened  
by heat, oblivious to a sudden, ominous  
darkness enveloping me, cannot lurch  
my tractor fast enough towards  
our equipment shed before the rain comes.



*Latonya Dargan*

**System**

The day starts slowly enough  
We move almost soundlessly  
through the morning routine—  
the pressure of the shower,  
the scraping of steel against china  
that marks our breakfast.  
I look sideways at you,  
trace the firmness of your features,  
they remind me of travel—  
the crossing of area,  
like the trip we took to Mexico.  
I remember the malaria you carried  
with you there,  
the fever-sleep and restless breathing.  
I wanted to take your pain  
in my hands, knead it like bread,  
store it for later use.  
You're moving to leave now,  
and I follow your lines,  
wonder where they eventually lead,  
what's at your center?  
I think about tonight,  
know that it, like all the others,  
will find me  
jerking myself awake,  
crawling to a space between the shadows.  
I'll listen to your breathing,  
hope that it will stop.  
Reaching out, I'll put  
my hand on your rib, press hard  
until it aches enough for both of us.



*Ted Howard*





### Beginning

I believe I was a gypsy  
in another life.  
The arch of my foot,  
the lines of my legs are clean enough  
to prove I could have danced well  
once in a lifetime  
I remember only when I dream.

When I close my eyes  
I always see the girl  
who looks and sounds like me  
black eyes, black hair, sharp smile.  
But it isn't me  
she sees beauty in small wonders—  
the arc of the sun,  
the sound that rain makes  
when it hits the ground,  
or the truth in the lines  
of a human palm.

Gypsies read palms like maps.  
They follow the lines, believing  
that the future can be predicted  
in the way they curve, their length,  
how they meet briefly and separate  
like strangers.  
The girl in my dream has a lifeline  
that stretches to her wrist—  
it tells her she will die  
very old.  
I look at my own hands  
and see the same patterns in my palms.  
I am tied to her  
like a circle  
with no bottom  
and no end.



*Greg Delisle***Blind Near Dover**

The foot creates the world for the body,  
saying "grass, rock, air," and so knows itself.  
My foot says, "a sturdy rock, slightly cold,"  
and I trust it with the possible,  
my closed eyes fly from the cliff.  
The forest is loud with a hundred breezes,  
and I'm standing on the foot's horizon.  
One rock is my whole field of view.  
My foot says it's not that far down;  
it can feel the bottom with a toe.  
I think it wants me to jump off,  
experience the Notion of rushing air,  
it wants to express itself in the sand.  
My foot whispers, "there's a dog,  
cartooned sharp teeth and a furry nose. Move."  
The foot experiments with the ear,  
"don't you hear snuffling?" but there's only  
a ruffling of the trees, like cards.  
The foot is taking its own gamble.  
"Wait, I was wrong." Somewhere close,  
an animal dashes through the brush.  
"It's grass. You're in a field now,  
it's low and flat and safe for miles.  
Can't you see it? Ah, of course, but trust me anyway."

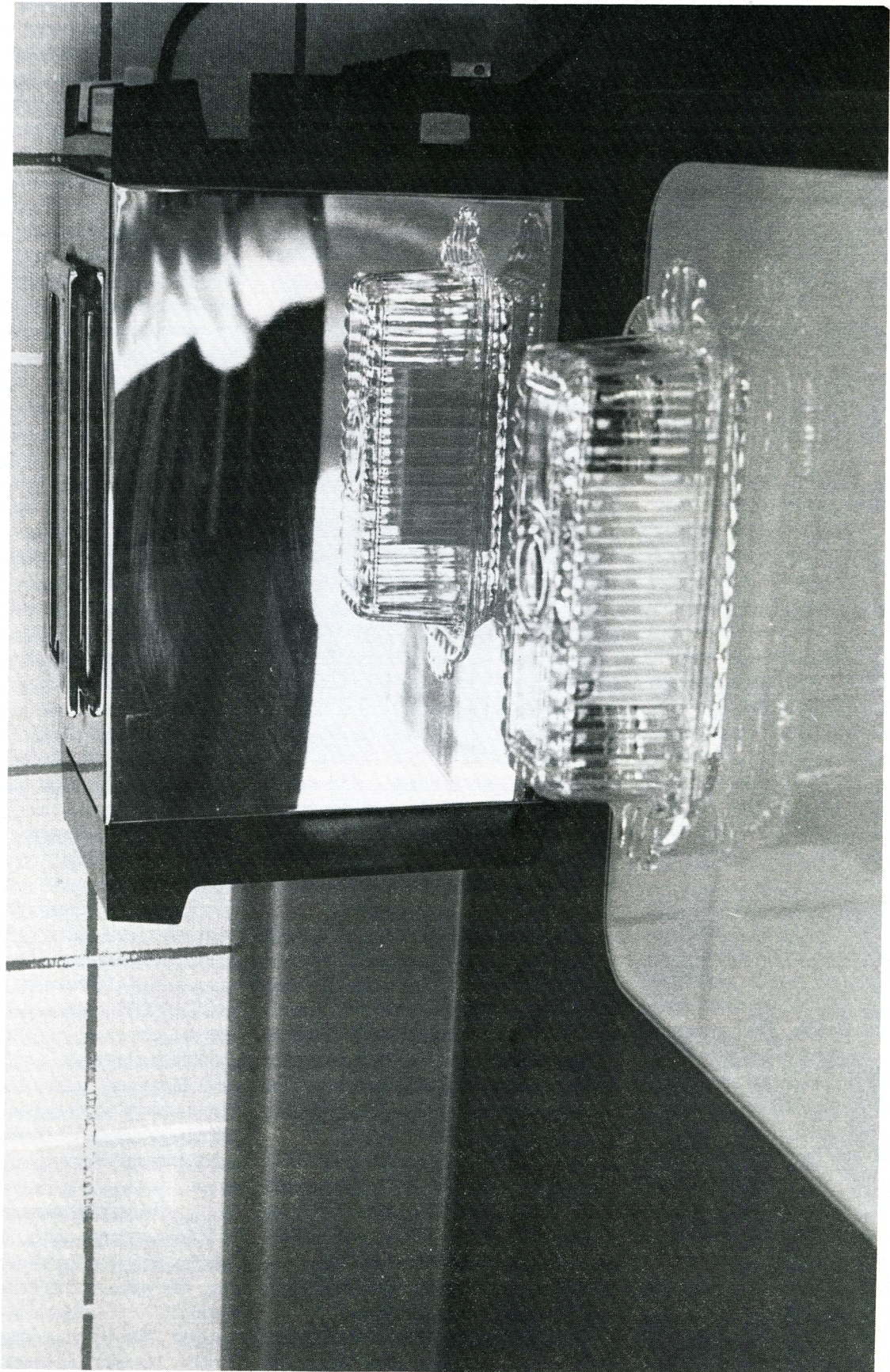


### **The Horizon Tally**

At every second, the sun creates two horizons,  
peeling back the dark from one while it  
covers another. This second, the rays  
dig up a desert and a moving car—  
the driver smiles as beams strike her face.  
She needed this, she's been driving all night  
and her wings are cramped and aching.  
"I'm in the good half now," she says.  
The horizon also touches the strings  
of a bass guitar in the back seat.  
Light has mass, so the strings vibrate,  
though not quite enough to make a sound.  
It's cool now in this valley, but soon  
it'll be hot enough to cook in.  
The driver knows, but stops anyway,  
tearing the hem of her dress in the car door  
though she doesn't seem to mind.  
Picking up the guitar, she finds it warm,  
feeling like it's just been played.  
She plugs the sound cord into the ground—  
the world is her amp— she steps back,  
takes a pick; "Nice place to start,"  
she says, this place is as good as any.



*John Gimber*





Tom Hall

## Prize Winner

## FORECLOSED

Luke Powers thought about breakfast and realized that his food had been tasteless for several months. The smell of his morning coffee no longer ran through his nose tickling his senses into awareness, and the bacon that snapped between his teeth had no taste, only a crunching presence. Maybe that was why he'd picked up the hitchhikers on his way to the courthouse. He looked around at the land agents who were setting up the loudspeakers and platform for the auctioneer. They moved with the crisp efficiency of men who knew their job, of men who had performed this particular task so many times that it was no longer necessary to think.

Early for the auction, Luke walked slowly over the new concrete sidewalk to the waist-high boxwoods that circled an ancient oak and sat on a wooden bench inside. He stared and remembered how hard a few old men had fought to keep this tree when the old courthouse was razed. Steel and glass, the new building exuded raw impersonal power, and the people with business there came and went hurriedly, as though they knew it was no longer a community center for the redress of their grievances, but a place where only the law resided. He tightened the blue denim work coat around his skinny body and tried to remember why he had picked up the hitchhikers.

At first he had thought, two more hitchhikers, bums on the road to nowhere, but the man had held his gloved hand head high, with a thumb out, and the gloves had matched a black felt hat. That was when he'd noticed the woman. She was standing behind the man and to one side, looking down at his feet as though measuring the amount of leather left on the man's shoes, and Luke could barely see one stocking leg and one high heel shoe that edged from behind the blue backpack laid on the ground. As he passed them, he noticed her dress was long and close fitting with a collar that tucked itself underneath her chin, and she wore a black beret that framed her face stylishly.

Neither of them moved, and for some ungodly reason, he stomped on the brakes and stopped. The man picked up

the pack, and they walked toward the truck as if they were approaching a mirage. She stood at the door, staring at the ground, while he put the pack in the truck-bed and then stepped back as he opened the door. She slid across the red cracked vinyl seat and sat in silence. The door slammed, and the man said, "Thanks for the ride, appreciate your kindness."

Black hair, cut short, stuck from underneath his hat and framed a broad face with black eyebrows and opaque eyes. The man had a hook nose with a thin white scar that curved from the corner of his left eye to his mouth in an extended smile, and the black stubble of his beard was interspersed with fray.

Anticipating the ripe smell of their unwashed bodies, Luke rolled down the side window and let in the raw November air that carried a cold hint of snow.

"You folks picked a bad day to hitchhike. Going far?" Luke asked.

"I hope not. We're headed to Topaz."

"Topaz, eh. A good place to visit. Tourist town. They roll up the sidewalks after the leaf-lookers are gone."

"That's fine with me. The fewer people, the better."

Luke reached to turn off the radio and noticed the woman's interlaced fingers pressing rhythmically against the back of her hands, her nails chewed to the quick. The man's accent and the woman's actions aroused his curiosity, and he asked, "You're not from around here, are you?"

"No, we're from Pennsylvania."

"You're a long ways from home with winter coming. Topaz ain't a cheap place either."

"Well, we've got a place to stay, and Angie needs some peace and quiet for a while...By the way, my name is Dave and this is Angie. You're?"

"Powers, Luke Powers."

Luke looked at the woman's hands again and said, "Topaz catches a lot of snow. You and your wife may be sick of peace and quiet, come spring."

"I hope not. Maybe, but there's not much of either one in Philadelphia."

"The city?"

"Yes."

"It's none of my business, but you folks ever lived in a small town?"

"No," Dave replied.

"Topaz might be a little strange to you. Not many people move in to stay. It's a rich little town. They take their

religion almost as serious as their money, and their liquor at home, regular. They're fond of appearances in Topaz, and you're two strange a ducks as I've seen hitchhiking."

"Are you saying we might have some trouble?" Dave asked.

"Not exactly. But you're getting there at the wrong time of the year. You won't fit, not at first anyway."

"We can work through that."

"You'll have a good deal of work to do."

In the distance an overloaded gravel truck pulled from a quarry entrance onto the highway, and Luke heard Dave ask Angie if she were comfortable. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the woman's head nod once like a mechanical toy. Without knowing why, he felt sorry for her, and he glanced at them, stiff and unmoving, as Dave draped his jacket over her legs. The lack of expression on her face made his stomach feel flat, and with a taste of bitterness in his mouth, he riveted his eyes to the highway.

The truck accelerated down the hill through a brief valley covered in white limestone dust. The quarry's twin smokestacks belched a continuous stream of smokey powder. As they overtook the gravel-hauler on the steep grade, the aged motor lost power, and Luke downshifted into second gear. The engine growled under the added strain, and he sniffed the air delicately for stale body odor. Not finding anything unusual, he rolled up the window against the cold. A few mud-brown leaves remained on the limbs of the poplars lining the road, and Luke's attention focused on the peak of the hill where carpenters were adding on to a white clapboard frame building. His vision swept to the gray obelisks that dotted the pale grass in front of the church and fastened on a narrow gravestone three feet tall. Since the addition began, he'd watched the grave as he drove past, but the truck's pace gave him a chance to reminisce, and his mind slipped to an earlier time when the boy who was buried there was lithe and vibrant.

Luke had returned early from one of his distant farms and had found his wife, Martha, sitting at the kitchen table weeping. His voice rose as he asked, "What's wrong?"

"Oh Luke, you've got to talk to Bobby. He didn't go to school today, and he told me he wasn't going to work to-



night."

"Why not? He knows if he don't work he can look for somewhere else to live."

Martha raised her head from cupped hands. Her blonde hair hung in disarray, her face swollen. She shook her head slowly and said, "Don't be so hard on him. He's still a child."

"Child? He's nineteen years old. When I was his age, I already owned a house and eleven acres."

"It was a four room shack with a hole in the bathroom floor, and the land was too poor to grow anything but pigweed," Martha replied.

Luke paced in front of the knotty pine cabinets and stopped to say, "Maybe that's what it was to you, but to me it was our home."

Martha placed her elbows on the table and clasped her hands as she raised her face toward the ceiling. She said almost inaudibly, "Luke, there is a war going on."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Have you ever thought that there might be a world outside of Clark County?"

"I know that! I've tried to explain the war to Bobby. I've told him that it's a fool's war, but the only thing he does is make fun of me. The boy avoids me whenever he can."

Martha dabbed her eyes with a crumpled tissue and said, "Do you know that he's talking about joining the Marines?"

Luke stopped pacing; his mouth fell open. Finally, he strode through the back door, sat in a rocking chair, and began shouting toward the kitchen door as he changed from his work shoes. "It's not enough that I've worked all my life to make it easier on him. No, he spurns me. I asked him to work with me. No, he wants to go to college. So I say fine, I'll pay. No, he goes to work at that God-cursed dye plant and makes me look like a fool. I'm going to shake that child till his teeth rattle." He yanked hard on the laces to his shoes, tying them so tight he could feel the pain run across the top of his feet.

Martha's voice floated from the kitchen to the back porch, "Don't fuss at him, Luke. He'll just get mad, and you two will fight again."

"Where is he?"

"He said he'd be with Johnny Arwood," she said.

Luke knew where to find them.

Gravel sprayed against the wheel wells of the truck. He could feel the sweat running down his arm, and he reached for a handkerchief to wipe his face. Heat rose from the blacktop in waves, blurring the oncoming cars that passed in bursts of superheated air.

A neon sign flashed "Arwood's A&W" above a painted mug of foamy root-beer. As he approached the drive-in, he could see a group of youngsters gathered around a shimmering yellow Chevy. He stopped fifty or sixty feet away from the gathering and shouted through the open window, "Bobby, come here, I need to talk to you."

He watched as his son brushed blond hair from his forehead and moved from the middle of the group.

*Blood ran from his son's lip, and Luke looked at his hand as though it belonged to someone else*

"Hey Dad," Bobby said.

"Get in, Bobby. I want to talk."

Bobby opened the door and sat with his right foot against the transmission casing and his back to the door.

Luke gripped the steering wheel tightly, knuckles white. He circled the drive-in, crossing the speed-bumps, and pulled onto the road. He searched for the source of his anger until he heard the scrape of metal unused to movement and saw Bobby trying to open the air vent.

"Leave that damned thing alone!" Luke said.

Bobby jerked back on the seat with his arms crossed, and Luke tried to concentrate on driving. He stopped at a red-light and blurted, "Boy, you're worrying your mother to death. What's wrong?"

Bobby shifted in his seat, bent to turn on the radio and said, "Nothing."

Luke pressed the gas pedal and wrenched the steering wheel left and right, slowing the truck through curves and bouncing over potholes.

"Your mother said that you're thinking about joining the Marines."

"Yeah."

Luke sagged into the seat momentarily, and tried to call up the words that would reach through Bobby's anger and make him listen. He said, "Bobby, son, you don't know nothing about war. I've talked to a lot of men who were in the Second World War, and they said it was pure hell coming and going. If you don't care anything about yourself, at least think about your mother. It'll kill her. Don't you care about the people who love you?"

"More than you. I care about people more than you ever have," Bobby said.

"Watch out boy. You don't even know."

"Know! Know what? I know you're never home till dark, and you're gone before daylight with never a kind word."

"By God that's all you know!"

"That's right! Nobody knows anything except you. Do it this way! Do it that way! Get out of the goddamn way, I'll do it myself! That's all we ever..."

"Goddamnit, I told you to watch it!"

"Watch what? Watch you toss us around like a sack of shit? Like a smile and a pat on the ass at Christmas'll do for another year? Money is..."

Luke's hand flashed from the steering wheel catching Bobby in the mouth, bouncing his head against the cab of the truck. Blood ran from his son's lip, and Luke looked at his hand as though it belonged to someone else. He wiped his trembling hand on his pants leg and gripped the shift lever. His eyes closed briefly as he said, "Son, I'm sorry. Believe me. I'm sorry."

"You're always sorry when it's too goddamn late!"

Blood flecked spittle hit Luke's arm and pain burned through his veins and balled in his gut. He tried to speak, then stopped. The truck seemed to steer itself over the snaky single lane that led home. Dust covered daisies and black-eyed susans drooped alongside the gravel road, and the sultry heat settled inside the cab.

Desperately, Luke tried to think of a way to start over, but the idiocy of his own father popped into his mind. Luke had whipped Bobby as a toddler for disobeying him, and the fat old man sitting on the porch had quoted from the Bible in a



sonorous voice, "The sins of the fathers will be visited upon the sons." The memory of the words held him mute.

They pulled into the driveway, and as Bobby got out he spoke through the truck window with cracked and swollen lips.

"Dad, you wouldn't fight for anything unless you could make money on it." Then he walked to the house.

The quiet words numbed Luke. After a moment, he shouted through the window, "Bobby," but his son had disappeared. It seemed as though it had taken him forever to get out of the truck, and his heavy feet had dragged him down the path to the small creek where he and Bobby had swum on hot lazy afternoons in happier times.

"Say, are you going to pull over here?" Dave asked.

Startled, Luke swerved the truck from the shoulder back onto the highway and said, "No, sorry. I must've been daydreaming."

"You got people buried over there, Mr. Powers?"

Luke tipped the brim of a blue denim Stetson out of his eyes and finally, with a half hitch in his voice said, "My son."

"I'm sorry. Was he in a car wreck?"

"No. In the war. A...," but he stuttered, bent forward, and fumbled with the heat controls.

"I am sorry Mr. Powers. I was over there. A lot of men died, and..."

"He's dead! Been dead nineteen years in July."

A tense quietness descended in the cab. Luke was numb with the thought that it had been too late before he hit his son, and he saw Angela turn, dipping her shoulder, and look up into his eyes. Her nostrils flexed with her breathing, her tongue flickered, moistening her lips, and her mouth pursed as if to speak. Her eyelids slid shut as she leaned back in the seat, and he waited for words that never came. His hands felt as if they would float from the steering wheel. He wanted to say something, to ask her why or what, but he only cleared his throat. He watched the dividing line in the highway until it became a solid blur carrying away his thoughts. After a time, a caution sign flashed yellow, warning of an approaching intersection, and Luke could see the

crossing in the distance.

"The road to Topaz is coming up. That where you folks want out?"

"That's right, Mr. Powers. Topaz is where we stop," Dave replied.

He pulled into a cleared area where a copse of maples had once colored autumn red and gold. Now, burnt brown garbage collectors were placed in a semi-circle with their maws open and waiting. A child's armless doll lay on grease-coated gravel in front of a dumpster, and plastic wrappers, paper bags and loose debris fluttered against the wire fence, driven and held by the wind. As Dave opened the

*They had been married for six months, their lovemaking fierce and sweaty in the darkened bedroom, when the desire to see Martha's naked body finally overcame him....*

door, the rank smell of stale garbage invaded the cab of the truck. Luke looked at Angie. She was frowning as her brown eyes flashed from the open door back to Luke, and he saw her hands unclasp. The left hand trembled as it moved slowly toward his arm, but then quickly darted to the dash, and she levered herself out of the truck, the seat springs creaking her farewell.

Luke was disturbed by the feelings the woman had provoked, and he felt uneasy and sorrowful as she moved away. Dave had removed the pack from the bed of the pick-up and returned to close the door with a "Thanks for the ride," before joining Angie. He placed one arm around her shoulder and pressed her close momentarily before taking her hand.

Luke watched the couple as they walked, thinking of Angie reaching toward him as though she were grasping at a stinging nettle. Then he remembered the look on her face as he had passed them on

the road, a look of utter resignation that said, "You've visited the worst upon me, the rest doesn't matter." He had seen such resignation only once in his life.

They had been married for six months, their lovemaking fierce and sweaty in the darkened bedroom, when the desire to see Martha's naked body finally overcame him, and one night he turned on the overhead light. Amidst her cries of "No... Please don't," and swinging arms, he forced her heavy cotton gown to her underarms baring her body. She ceased struggling, and he rolled to her side and watched her pink-tipped breasts as they rose and fell. The small mound of her stomach was dimpled by a tiny navel, and golden hair wound its way to the curly mass at the center of her body. He reached out and traced a thin blue vein in her thigh before removing his hand, mystified by the roundness and delicacy of her body. They lay quietly, and his eyes wandered over her until he looked at her face and into her eyes. Then, he understood that he had stolen her dignity and in shame turned out the lights on his way across the cold floor to the couch.

He had slept in the living room in his pride until one morning, instead of slipping out the door, he wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in her neck. The soft, clean warmth of her body drove out the loneliness, but the memory of the pain he'd caused slowly pulled his arms away. He'd barely been able to mumble, "See you later." That night she had come to the couch and had led him to their bed.

He roused from his memories as an old red Dodge pulled to a dumpster and a cadaverous man and a short plump woman got out and picked through the trash, collecting the twisted frame of a yard-chair and a bag of aluminum cans before depositing their own trash. Luke watched them go through each container. Suddenly, he jerked the truck in gear, embarrassed by their scavenging, and drove onto the road.

As he rounded the courthouse square looking for a parking place, he saw the McClouds' battered pickup and decided to park as far away as possible. He turned right in the parking reserved for the customers of the U-Like-It Cafe.

Normally, Luke would have waited at the cafe drinking coffee, listening to the gossip, and flirting with the waitresses. But today, he carried an ache in his stomach like a blue rock and wanted



only to rid himself of his troubles, alone.

He slammed hard the driver's door. The wind carried dark clouds with it, and the sky was a solid banked lead-gray. The old red-brick buildings seemed shabby with recessed mortar, eroded by the weather, turning gradually to sand. Dead grass and dirt stained the cracks in the sidewalk polished by time and countless feet. Decrepit buildings, vacant lots, and crumbling walkways circled a new courthouse as if in attack, but unable to overcome the inertia of decay, they slowly disintegrated. He hadn't replied to the greetings of friends and acquaintances, and had crossed the street and headed for the liar's bench on the courthouse lawn, an old oak surrounded by benches, and in turn by boxwoods.

Luke tried to concentrate and knew that his dissatisfaction was not totally the result of his encounter with the hitchhikers. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a little boy standing at the end of the bench. The child bothered him, and as he turned back to the oak, a small, clear voice said, "Mister, are you the man that's going to take my mommy and daddy's house?"

Luke looked up, startled, to see blue eyes fixed intently on his face, and suddenly ashamed, he stammered, "No, not me. You've got the wrong man, Sonny."

"My mommy said you were the one."

Luke's forehead wrinkled and rolled his eyebrows as he said, "Where is your mama anyway? Somebody needs to tend to you. You're too young to be running around pestering people."

The boy spoke quickly, "You're mean," then fled across the courthouse lawn.

Luke watched the boy as he ran across the lawn, seeing pale skin and red socks flash beneath blue pant-legs. The child stopped beside a tall black-haired woman in a shiny wool skirt who reached down and smoothed his ruffled hair before picking him up and swinging him on a practiced hip. The child buried his face in her hair and then peeked over her shoulder to see if the old man was still on the bench. Luke cursed, "Hell, I'm not taking his home. Boyd and Catiline should've been more careful when they bought the place, and they wouldn't be going through a foreclosure sale."

Luke watched the gathering crowd and saw an old acquaintance, Jack

Duval, walking toward him. He was a big man with shoulders squared back and wore a brown felt hat that seemed untouched by the wind. His expensively clad feet hit the concrete with a surety that said this is mine. He came up to Luke and asked, "Hey, how come you're not at the U-Like-It sucking down coffee?"

"Didn't much feel like it today, Jack."

"Yeah, well. Say, doesn't the McCloud place join you in the back?"

"Now Jack, you know that."

"I just wanted to be sure about it. Are you thinking on it?"

*...why, by the  
blessed bones of  
God, did he leave  
Philadelphia for  
the mountains...  
Oh hell, I might  
as well ask a coon  
why it shits on a  
creek bank.*

"Could be."

"Well, it joins you and the Johnsons, and they're not interested, so I thought I'd check you before."

"Before what?"

"Why before we bump heads bidding."

"Somebody's going to. Might as well be us."

Jack let out a braying laugh and said, "Damn Luke, you're testy today. Well, there's no need for us to run up the price. Anything above a hundred and seventy-five thousand is what it'll go for."

Luke's eyebrows arched and he asked, "How do you know that?"

"The manager at Farm Credit told me McCloud got the Federal Land Bank to finance it for that."

"Why in hell are they foreclosing then?"

"Both outfits are at each other's throats over the loan business, Luke, and Bob..."

"That says it. He's a horse's ass."

"I don't know about that, but there's no need for two old traders like us to drop our wallets trying to outbid each other. Nobody here can swing this deal right now except you or me. So, if you want it, you take it. If you don't I will. What do you say?"

"We'll see."

"Huh! That's not much of an answer. Why don't you go get some coffee and settle down, old man?"

"Go to hell, Jack."

The braying laugh came again, and he said, "Buy it cheap and sell it high, Luke." Jack kept laughing as he ambled to a group of men gathered around a portable kerosene heater.

The thought of coffee was tempting, and he glanced at the U-Like-It in time to see a man wearing a black felt hat enter the restaurant. At first he thought it was Dave, but a picture of the hitchhikers holding hands formed in his mind, and he knew why they were on the road to Topaz. He'd wanted to ask the man why, by the blessed bones of God, did he leave Philadelphia for the mountains, and why did he drag that poor off-center woman with him. Life's hard on the able without adding the disabled. She ought to be in a hospital. It don't make much sense. They're doing everything wrong. But what if they're not? Oh hell, I might as well ask a coon why it shits on a creekbank. People never catch on till it's too late.

"Catch on" echoed in his mind. Luke turned to watch the men at the heater wait in turn to shake Jack's hand, and to the side, he saw the child, in his mother's arms, still watching. The past looped through his memories flowing into the present, and Luke drifted.

It had been a bright Saturday morning, and they had overslept. After breakfast Luke had gone into the bathroom to shave, and Bobby had trailed a shadow behind him. Luke began going through the ritual of running hot water and working up lather, foamy and white, in his new shaving mug. He sat the mug on the sink ledge beside the old claw-footed bathtub and methodically brushed lather on his face. He looked down and saw Bobby standing in the bathtub, pretending to shave with his toy razor. His son looked up with laughter in his small blue eyes and said in the halting voice of a child not yet comfortable with language, "Daddy, I'm big boy now." Luke smiled and picked up his razor and began to shave. He made the



first stroke, and the lather disappeared leaving a pink strip on the side of his face. As the lather and whiskers rinsed down the drain, a sudden "Kraang" erupted into the quiet. He looked down to see the mug and handle bounce from the edge of the tub and fall separately to the floor.

Luke felt the blood rush to his face with the steamy heat from the sink, and said, "Boy! See what you've done. God damnit! Get outta here before I whip your ass!"

The happiness in the child's eyes fled with the quivering of pink lips. Luke watched tiny fingers grasp the edge of the tub and heard water suction as Bobby crawled out and fled from the bathroom. He glanced back into the tub and saw the small toy razor floating on the ripples. He turned to the mirror, irritated, and cut himself twice. He quickly washed his face and started to put toilet paper on the cuts when Martha's image appeared in the mirror. Her lips were pulled into a tight line, and he knew she was mad so he continued to paste paper on the bloody spots. Finally, she said, "What did you do to that child? No, I don't care what you did. You go into his bedroom and get him out from under the bed and tell him you're sorry."

"Now, Martha,"

"No, Luke, you go tell that child you're sorry!"

For a moment he stared into the mirror at his image, thinking, "What in hell's got into her anyway?" He heard Martha's footsteps coming back down the hall and past the bedroom, checking. He shrugged and walked to Bobby's bedroom. Curtains, tanned from the sun, billowed in the darkened room where Red Ryder and Little Beaver stared at the ceiling from a faded-blue bedspread.

Luke said, "Come out from under there, Bobby. I want to talk to you."

"Dho, you don't lub me."

Luke listened to the snuffle of tears and said, "Bobby, you know I love you, son. Come out from under that bed and talk to Daddy, okay?"

"Dho."

Luke looked around the room and saw a scuffed leather holster and a hammerless cap pistol. He'd bought them for the boy's birthday a year ago, and Bobby carried them wherever he went. Luke picked up the holster and pistol and slid them under the bed.

"Bobby, who bought you these?

Now, would I buy you presents if I didn't love you? Come out and talk to Daddy. I'm not gonna whip you... Please."

Luke heard the bare skin scrape across the wooden floor and saw the teary blue eyes stare up at him. "Damn," he cursed under his breath, if only they wouldn't look at you like a gutshot dog. He picked up the child, wondering at the cool softness of his skin, at the silken mass of white hair, and as he pressed Bobby to his chest, he could feel the small body tremble as the hot wet face pressed into his neck.

Rocking back and forth, Luke murmured in his ear and felt a surge of emotion sweep through him. The warm breeze blowing through the window was like needles prickling his body, and honey-suckled air filled his lungs, congealing and choking him as he held his son tighter and tighter. Overcome by his feelings, he lay the child on the bed and said, "There now, Daddy still loves you." He walked to the rattle of dishes in the kitchen and leaned against the door frame, shaken by a weakness that left his arms and legs trembling.

A single light bulb hung from the ceiling on a green twisted cord covered with fly specks, and yellow walls sucked up the light in an attempt to glow. Martha continued putting the dishes away, and with her back to him said, "You don't have to learn to love a child, Luke. They're helpless. They believe everything you tell them. They know when you love, and they know when you don't. He's still a baby. Love him in his time." Her words seemed like they were coming from a tunnel, hollow and mournful.

He had walked down the hall into their good bedroom and had put on a clean shirt, his blue good-luck trading shirt. There was business to do, cattle and land to be bought and sold, and he had no time for the wailings of a child or a woman. He ran his arms through the starch-pressed sleeves and felt strength flow into him with the brush of stiff cloth.

The auctioneer's chant broke through his memories. The auction had started without his noticing it, and he rose to join the people in a semi-circle around the platform. He glanced at Jack, face flushed from the wind, and the man winked at him. Luke walked around the small group. The chant broke one hundred and thirty thousand, and he felt his arm fly into the air and heard his voice shout, "Yeah," and saw Jack smile.

The bidding became slower as Luke quickly bid each raise, but the McClouds stalled, raising their bid only at the last moment. The auctioneer lowered his voice, and Luke strained to hear the call for one hundred seventy thousand before slowly raising his hand, no longer shouting. As he turned to watch the McClouds make their last bid, he saw Jack wave and walk to the courthouse doors, and Luke felt hollow and small.

A quick tear slid down Cataline's cheek, and she stooped like an old woman to pick up her child. The last of autumn's leaves rattled in the wind, and above the flapping of coats, Luke thought he heard the child ask to go home.

The red face lay on her shoulder. Luke could see the teary eyes, the runny nose, hear the sound of Bobby's feet running down the hall, his shrill joyous laughter. But his vision blurred, and the child's face turned into the grey puttied face of his son in a glass-enclosed coffin. The cold air turned to fire in his lungs, and he clenched shut his eyes. He wanted to scream, "No! No! It's not true," but only a long moan escaped in a hiss of breath. Again, and louder, he shouted, "No!" He blinked his eyes, trying to focus, but saw the McClouds staring at him, and the auctioneer quiet. His voice surprised him. It sounded thin and worn as he said, "It was a mistake. I mean that. I didn't realize. I didn't know."

The auctioneer, with a wide toothy grin, returned to the stand, "One-seventy-five twice, one-seventy-five three times, and sold top Boyd McCloud for one-hundred and seventy-five-thousand dollars."

Luke was walking away from the auction into the wind when Jack Duval caught up to him.

"Luke, what the hell's going on? I thought you were buying the damn thing."

"Nothing to brag about, Jack."

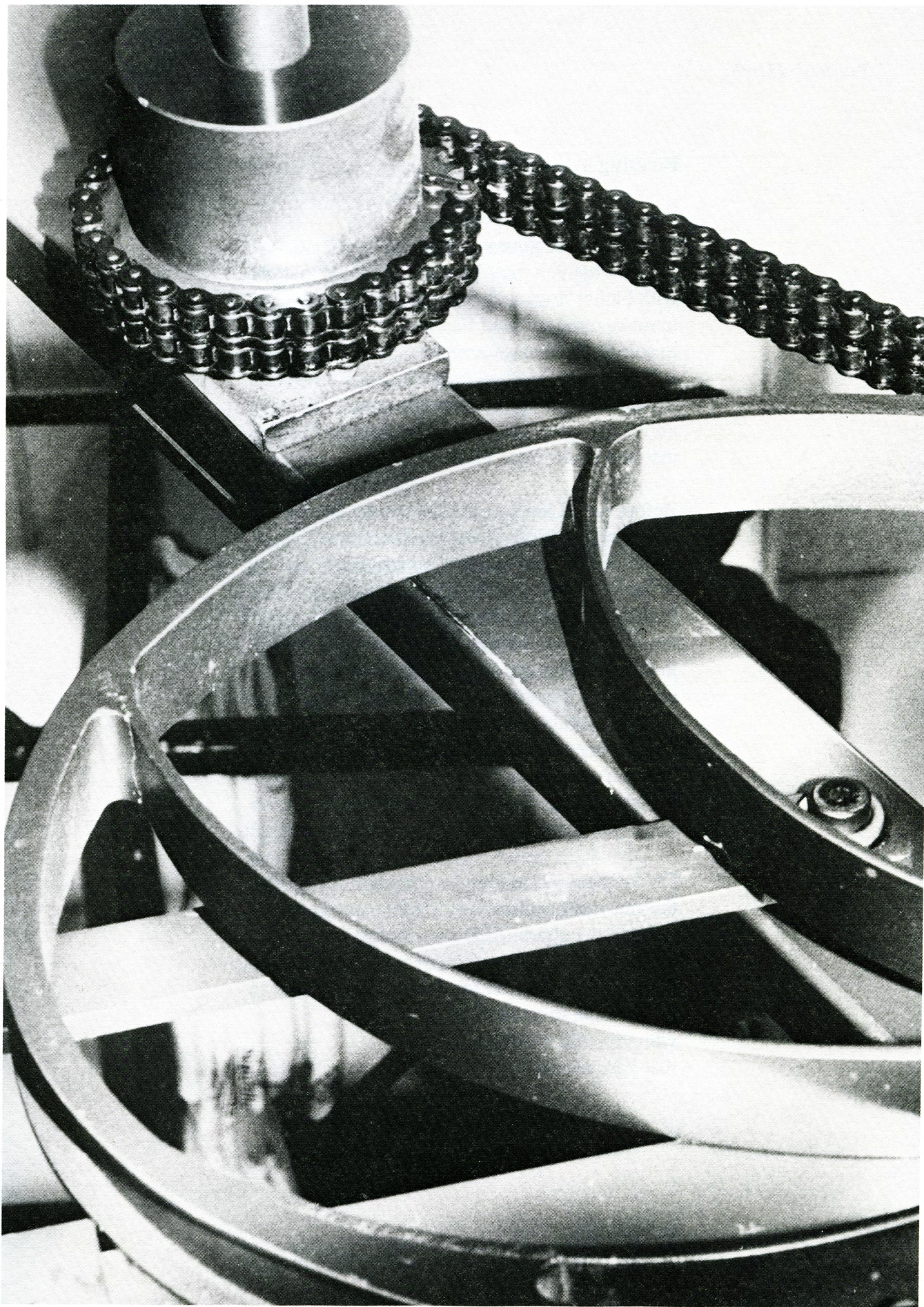
"What?"

"Damn it! I couldn't have slept with it."

Luke eased himself across the street and past the U-Like-It Cafe to the parking lot where he had left his pickup. He saw it truly for the first time, primer showing through the paint, rust through the primer, an old, dilapidated truck. He opened the door and sat with one foot hanging outside and stared through the windshield into the bricks.



*Greg Bean*





*Yvonne Hart*

**Birth**

I thought about it all evening,  
the sureness of your voice when you talked  
to me, what you must have said when you spoke  
with Father. I wanted to touch your hands,  
to make mine soft and flawless,  
to somehow become graceful.  
After supper, I studied myself in the mirror,  
my square hips and too-strong arms,  
no wonder you told me to go with him,  
that you could clean up.

Before dark I helped put up a young cow  
ready to give birth; it was her first time.  
I watched Father calm her, his voice lost  
in the wind passing through cracks  
in the barn walls. I tried to imagine  
the calf that would look at me  
in the morning, it's questioning eyes  
making me beautiful. When we realized  
the birth would not come easy,  
he kept her calm while I turned the baby,  
my stomach tightened into a fist,  
my hands steady, the way I'd seen yours  
when you sewed me a dress or held Father's belt.

On dairy mornings you don't notice  
the sunrise; I could see the calf  
lying in the afterbirth, it's mother ready  
to give milk and warmth, and it was more  
than I could've asked for. I didn't need  
the sunlight to understand  
why you told me to go, to know  
that I am needed.



*Helga Kidder***Two Girls Playing In A Confiscated Villa  
In Post-War Germany**

The German girl knew how to play  
in both languages, but the French girl  
kept asking, "Qu'est-ce que c'est?"

They were tucking their dolls  
tightly underneath their breasts,  
changed diapers from old scraps  
of make-shift bandages,  
put them in their wicker  
carriages for a nap.  
And if one of the few passing cars  
tooted its horn, they'd pretend  
to hear the siren they thought  
made planes appear  
with their steady hum.  
They would clutch their dolls,  
run to the entry door, down the stairs  
to the cellar, and use their thin blankets  
to cradle them into the rocky pile of coal.

They didn't mind sitting in the dark  
where things turn grey after a while.  
Together they nibbled on bread crusts  
and dried apples from their ration shelf  
and the French girl questioned nothing.  
she knew upstairs the maid would fix  
them soft round bread with mounds  
of strawberry jam and fat glasses  
of buttermilk.



*Michelle Lilly*

**The Day You Left for Annapolis, January 1987**

The slender branches of the naked  
Winter trees strain and stretch  
Up to the air-blood like capillaries  
While today passes like wind  
Over an empty lot, scraps of paper  
And brittle leaves driven before it  
And away. Earlier at the airport  
Didn't seem real. The crowds  
Were like shoppers lining up  
For a sale, and we said goodbye  
Like two strangers from a commercial.  
After the plane slanted skyward,  
I wandered through the gift shop,  
A tourist needing souvenirs. A TV  
Held me paralyzed in the lobby  
As a newscaster spoke the life  
Of a football player from Georgia  
Who had died of the flu. I guess  
I've always thought our souls—  
If you can believe in such a thing—  
Touched at the very edges, or maybe  
Not quite— like neurons just a synapse  
Apart. I want to fling my voice  
Into your airspace, to say something  
Real to keep the small talk  
From crowding in and to soak up  
The flu. I wish I were that tree  
Standing on my root-tips or even  
That paper just racing a wind.



*Khaled Mattawa***Growing Up With A Sears Catalog  
In Benghazi, Libya**

*Remember that patch of grass  
you grew to make your garden  
look like England, like some picture in a magazine?  
The grass grew so tall, your mother hated it, and  
your England went to the goats, he said to me  
laughing. Sure,*

I remember. I remember how  
I used to sleep in my England  
on warm spring afternoons, sun  
so hot, I could feel it melting my eyes. My brother-  
in-law opens his brand new '79 Sears catalog to a  
picture of a pink man riding a bright red lawn mower,  
the grass couldn't have been taller than an inch.

*I know generals who grow grass in their villas just  
like you did, Khaled. That's what I'll sell 'em: shiny  
lawn mowers. I'll charge 'em double, triple; I'll make  
a fucking fortune. In two years, I'll buy a big house in  
Malibu. And then he'd light a cigarette, hold it  
between tired yellow teeth. His dreams put him to  
sleep and he'd snore in my sister's*

lap. I'd take the catalog to my room and look at the  
pink man again. I could've sworn he was my uncle.  
I'd open to picture of women in transparent bras,  
how I loved their black nipples and full grey breasts.  
I used to dream of camping with one of them in the  
\$42 Coleman tent, and of fishing on a lake without mosquitos,

sailing the blue boat on page 613. I would wear khaki  
pants and a plaid shirt like the picture on the cover.  
My woman would take me  
biking if we got bored, or we could make love on the  
mattress on page 1247. One morning, I told a friend  
that's how I saw heaven;

(stanza break)



one morning, my brother-in-law  
and I went to the airport and my father cried like a  
widdow. We landed in New Orleans in the heat. The  
stink of Bogaloosa made us nauseous, and on the way  
to Hattiesburg a million mosquitos died on the taxi's  
windshield. We spent the night in  
a Motel 6, got up bright and early to make our  
fortune. We made our way

to Sears. They were sold out of lawn mowers,  
except for one and he hugged it as though it were a  
fat ram. He bargained in English,  
got his price like he told me.

I sat behind him and we rode out for lunch. He  
waved at people and smiled. At Morrison's, I met a  
woman who bought all her clothes from Sears. She  
was with me when he said goodbye, was with me  
when my hair turned grey, and my face  
turned pink.

### Ramadan

In Ramadan the moon becomes a princess  
with the stars fanning her,  
Jupiter brings her a cup of wine  
while Mars sings a *mawal*.  
Bearded men with rosaries  
and tiny yellow booklets stare at her,  
point their fingers at her waist.  
She winks at them,  
and their shrivelled faces blush.  
Dazed, they walk home to bewildered wives.

The spirits of Johnny Walker and gin  
hide behind sinks



or in the trunks of White Peugeots.  
In the Arab nightclubs of London and Paris  
they serve you non-alcoholic beer  
and the belly-dancers cover their flesh.

During the day my mother  
forgets to feed her goats and chickens  
because it's only fair.  
She rushes to them once she hears  
the hoarse roosters crowing  
and the sounds of the billy goats butting  
over the last straw.

In our house one breaks hunger and thirst  
with three dates from Iraq  
and a glass of homemade buttermilk.  
We dine on lamb soup flavored with mint  
and a mound of stuffed grape leaves and squash—  
and that's only the beginning.  
At night we find God and His book  
and lose patience with each other.

Our neighbor who has 16 children  
comes to visit bringing 2 kilos of baklava.  
He washes them down with a gallon  
of sweet cardamon tea.  
Before the crack of dawn shuts him off,  
he runs to one of his two wives,  
both named Salma, and loves one hurriedly,  
his hands barely touch her breasts.



**Amy McBride**

**Love Sick**

*"To love is to wish to be loved."*  
— *Jean-Paul Sartre*

She never understood why  
her stomach cramped whenever  
she curled up in the arms  
of her lover. Romance gives you  
butterflies but never  
indigestion. So hers was a silent  
repulsion of the mahogany arms that  
twisted around a body and hands that  
only made matters worse when they  
pressed into her soft belly and stroked  
the small of her back

Sometimes she'd fancy herself a  
wood nymph, only temporary, or a wispy  
haired child taken by an illness  
too sorrowful to talk of  
in proper company.  
Coasting on waves of what if, she  
could lose herself— lose the pain.

"Are you all right?" he whispers  
And her only answer can be  
to curl into him even farther.



*John Gimber*





### Too Close to Nothing

Don't try to know why old ladies  
get up in the mornings  
and twist their hair until it hurts.  
Don't question why two waxy braids seem all that's left  
to greet the overweight orderly as he makes his rounds.

It's bad enough that he pops his gum  
while in and out of the stained  
double-breasted jacket  
moves a finger too closely resembling  
the stewed carrots which linger in crockpots  
long after the roast is gone.

"But your fingers aren't orange" she chirps  
tossing braids over bony shoulders  
"even if your thighs do look like potroasts."  
The rapture of Juicy-Fruit  
explodes in her ears and ten fleshy carrots  
strip the soiled linens.

Somewhere past the nurse's station  
at Our Lady of Immaculate Conception Home for the Elderly  
lies the reason for an underpaid orderly to  
exist off the bitter thickness of Godiva chocolates.  
He had waddled down the hallway  
fingering the mole on his chest  
and searching for the nameplate that almost too simply  
matched the yellow envelope in his hand.  
And he found Mr. Otto Fletcher watching Jeopardy.  
Mr. Otto Fletcher who didn't so much as  
glance at the ancient love-letter  
that once, in a hasty youth  
he had addressed to "Little Miss Pigtails."  
"What are you putting in my lap you overgrown homo? Gel the Hell out."  
And that was enough to send anyone's potroasts reeling.

Now she can twist those braids until they fall off,  
and he could find a letter from the Queen  
underneath her slobber-stained pillow  
but it wouldn't matter. He already  
knows a sugar-dusted, chocolate truffle  
is the closest thing to salvation  
that he'll ever get.



*Laurie Perry*

**The Grand Opening of the Plaza**

*for BM*

You ask me to find a poem in the slice of  
blue ribbon you hand me at the Plaza, the  
slick silk that meant the place was new,  
freshly walked, the sods of grass unsettled,  
the trees placed, straightened by wire.  
The white balloons celebrated the grand  
opening of sky. To say they were anything  
like birds would be too simple for they  
are nothing like the pigeons that fence the  
brows of buildings. And they were too  
noticeable to resemble the city's sparrows  
that will come to nest in the bushes or the  
loft of the pavilion. Those who work  
downtown and those who wait on the buses  
would like to think watching the thousands  
of balloons leave the earth, the ribbon cut,  
the music played, would free them for a  
time from this imperfect geometry of streets.



*Richard Seehuus*

**Calving—Red Lake, Minnesota**

At least, in the wet woods  
I half knew where to go:  
following cow paths,  
looking for dead-fall  
and the wild birthed calves below.  
What should I tell you?  
That I never left the woods  
without the calf, wet  
and purple just under the skin,  
slung on my shoulders,  
sucking at my hair?  
That I always found pin-cherries  
or raspberries? That the night  
I spent lost was wonderful?  
I tell you it was eternal.  
Mist rose from the ferns and caught  
in low branches. A red-tailed hawk  
watched forever then missed  
his strike at a spring-fat mouse.  
Leaves still dripped from the day's rain  
and I was as wet as the ferns,  
as the ground. Will you understand?  
Following the morning's glare home  
I nearly fell over the Guernsey  
and her calf, half born and strangled blue  
by the umbilical. She foamed  
with effort, her bright stretched belly  
was speckled with leaves and black  
blood. I kneeled in the soft ground  
raised her head to my lap  
and gently cut her throat.  
When I found home, I pulled  
off my boots and slept  
all day and all that night in wet  
clothes. I dreamed of the Guernsey  
in rain-wet woods—ignoring  
the cow paths, moving through



trees and over the dead-fall  
 like a doe, stripping pin-cherries  
 from thin black branches and slipping  
 away to deliver her fawn.  
 What can I say now, eight years  
 from Minnesota and warm  
 in a southern winter? I can't  
 end anything here—back at Red Lake  
 we would find the calf, slick  
 and alive, squeaking out its first  
 wet cries. We would find raspberries  
 and I would know what to say.

### Exercise #28

Mount this poem on black velvet, hang  
 it in your closet to keep the slippers company.  
 Elvis is mildewed, the tight-assed bullfighter  
 has faded to pastels. Even the Last Supper  
 is dusty: motes cover Christ's table like snow.  
 A milk-weed seed rises from Peter's hand like a goblet  
 of Pina Colada, carried by impossible thermals  
 in this suburban air. It spirals up to rest  
 on your bowling ball, the singular sperm lucky  
 to bump an egg. Imagine the product, rushed  
 to term, born again and again in your lines.

How do you trust a poem like this? Flying  
 into an empty warehouse, you are a paper-airplane  
 unafraid of dead air. You are the backyard father, pleading  
*Step into it, step into it* to a child plagued by strike-outs  
 and apathy. Finally a foul-tip, and that's good enough,  
 you saint, you brickyard of emotions.



*Shannon Smith*

**Mr. Darby Finds a More  
Endurable Laundromat**

This is no ordinary laundromat.  
On a big-screen TV, Floyd Cramer  
plays “What a Friend we Have in Jesus”  
so full of kitsch and grace notes,  
Darby wants to kill. He moves on  
to the pinball machine, which a young boy  
is playing with passion. It turns out  
Floyd Cramer’s face is on the machine,  
10,000 points if you get a ball in his eyes  
or mouth, but if you lose, it plays  
“Amazing Grace,” flipping every note  
like a finger, as if there were two songs  
not quite in sync— Old Floyd  
can play a duet with himself;  
that’s why he can’t fall in love.

Darby puts his two loads  
in machines twelve and thirteen,  
waits till the water kisses the rim  
to put in the soap. Looking around,  
he decides the man unloading  
dryer nineteen folds his boxer shorts  
too flagrantly. The woman at the super washer,  
however, is turned on. Darby thinks  
he’s too old for this; in his day,  
laundry was something you did by yourself,  
and you only showed your underwear  
to someone you loved. The waitress—  
this amazes Darby— asks for his order;  
it’s happy hour: double shots of brandy  
and detergent till seven. Darby orders,  
then adds bleach to his whites.

Last week, he tried the Live and Let Live  
laundromat on the boulevard. A young man  
with a torn shirt and an earring through one nipple



had asked him for bleach and a dryer sheet.  
This place is more Darby's speed; here he can buy  
frozen yogurt and cocktails, play pool,  
do his laundry. He'd almost forget  
the laundry. Darby thinks he's found America,  
whiter-than white and carpeted,  
and as he moves his clothes to the dryer,  
he thinks of his mother and her  
wringers and washtubs, remembers  
the time he caught his fingers in the rollers,  
even now the tips are a little flat.

When it's time to go, he hangs up  
his four long-sleeve white shirts,  
seven pairs of black socks, flips  
his sheets across the long folding table.  
If this were a commercial, he'd fall in love  
over these sheets; some rosy-cheeked  
grandmother would show him how to do it right,  
but all he finds is a coupon for another wash,  
a too-sweet smile from the girl  
behind the counter. As he leaves,  
he notices the super-washer woman  
is crying; the man with the sexy shorts  
is nowhere to be seen, and Darby  
can't tell if it's her detergent or her life,  
so he smiles, she smiles, and if this is tragedy,  
somehow, it will wash out.



**2 AM In My Uncle's Basement Bar;  
Rover's on the Floor; It Looks Bad**

Collared with the bright stench of whiskey,  
my Uncle Milton's alcoholic dog plays dead;

he plays it loud, and in an elongated key,  
flinging the notes over my head, great boomerangs

of doubt and vaguely suppressed ineptitude.  
Howling, he'd call it, if he knew the dull clanks

and tympanic rattle of our ordinary language.  
He's tanked to the teeth for good reason;

the last bird he chased left him with two dents  
in the top of his head and a mouthful of sly feathers.

Uncle Milton's drunk too. "O Dog of Life," he says,  
and raises his mug. "Poor crazy bastard."

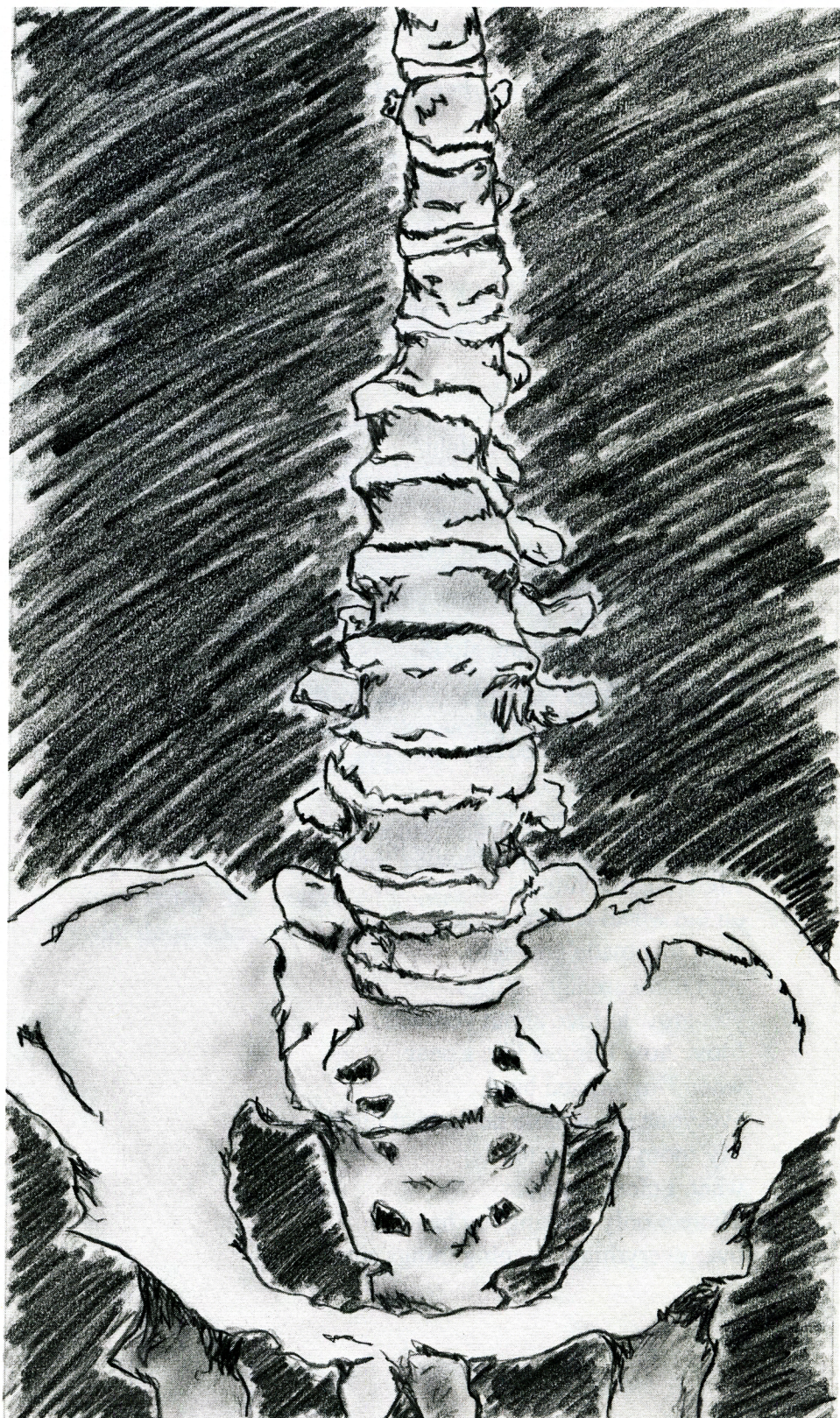
Rover raises his fuzzy muzzle to him, "Drink to me  
only with thy big brown eyes." Milton laughs.

In the light of the lava-lamp, the two are a matched set,  
riding together in the big red pickup truck of fate,

ears streaming in the wind, bugs in their teeth,  
tongues lolling slightly to the left.



*Lisa Blevins*





*Cathy Wagner*

**My Neck Flinches**

My neck flinches whenever I say I,  
so I'm practicing:  
I walked on the sidewalk,  
I left the lunchroom  
because no one interrupted me,  
I bought a paper,  
I took it into the sun  
and no one admired me,  
I sang in the street that night,  
the streetlights bees in a dark flower,  
and no one wondered at me.  
I need something to keep it in,  
this little scratching,  
this little hello.  
If I could say anything aloud,  
if I had honesty in me.  
But instead, every word,  
every woman in the rain,  
could fit the radio  
on the highway to Knoxville,  
that passing old man opening his mouth,  
stretching his fingers  
on the wheel to look back,  
even that made gorgeous.  
And there are ugly things  
you grow to love about yourself.  
I love how I bruise like a pear  
when I'm pressed hard,  
everyone has a mole he feels at night.  
My room is much too big  
when I close my eyes.  
There's only running my hands  
over everything, keeping things small.



### Seeing Dolly Parton at the Hardee's

Why do you keep that shadow  
wiped over your eyes? But god it's lovely.  
You're not like anything I know.

I've tried for years to find a job, a girl, some row to hoe;  
now I wash dishes here, I love you, and I don't see  
why you keep that shadow

between your breasts, your lips in a too-wet bow.  
But your eyes are like a song by Conway Twitty—  
"You're Not Like Anything I Know,"

or "I Can Tell You've Never Been This Far Before," so  
bluey-blank, yet you're all sequined sex. In line at Hardee's,  
"Why do you keep that shadow

in your face?" you asked, and touched my cheek. I felt so low.  
I could break your waist with one big hand, Dolly.  
You're not like anything I know.

It's not that I have no other life, it's that I see no "no"  
in you. "You're handsome, brave," your sweet quaver sings to me,  
"you're not like anything I know—  
why do you keep that shadow?"



**Aunt Sylvie at Ocean City**

On the beach lot, Buicks in the sun,  
the drunken surfer rolls his shoulders toward  
you. And over in the changing hut, it's flowered

and frightful. Damn the drains you don't step on,  
the open, salty clerestory for peepers. Damn  
the cheerful stripe of your one-piece. A panic

in the hut's sulfurous shower—outside, ham  
and wheat bread on each corner of the plastic,  
my uncle's whistling as he pours the beer,

my cousin's already in the water. Towel  
flapping your hip, you emerge, an ear  
for the same noises: us kids, the trial

by water. We see your non-negotiable smile.  
You're coming fast, sand scattering, legs too pale.



*Prize Winner- Greg Bean*





## Contributors:

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*The Sequoya Review regrets that it was unable to publish all of the submissions it received. Contributors who have not had their submissions returned may contact the office of the magazine at (615) 755-4294. We hope that the contributors and others will continue to submit their work in the future, and we look forward to the Review's continued support from both the campus and the entire community.*

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